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MY TOP 5 IRRITANTS:

AT AIRPORTS, ON PLANES AND IN HOTELS

by Philip Baum

It's that time of year. As Christmas approaches and a new year beckons, television and radio stations, news networks and social media sites come up with their annual 'Top 10s', 'Best of...' and 'Funniest...' listings and countdowns. So why should we be any different?

Well, this is a serious journal and as such, aside from a few of our *Air Watch* listings - included to lighten up the mood on an otherwise somewhat dark subject matter - we avoid humour. It wouldn't be appreciated if we had *Aviation Security International's* 'Top 10 Hijackers' or 'Worst Airports for Security'. There may be acceptance of our highlighting the bizarre antics of the world's unruly passengers, perhaps even grading them for impact, but even there, whilst many of the stories are, with hindsight, amusing, for the crewmembers having to manage the incidents at the time there was little to laugh about.

But in that unruly passenger vein, perhaps we can look at the top causes of frustration? Some, on the surface, may seem trivial, but as more people take to the skies, and our customers and guests become ever more demanding, airports and

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airlines are going to need to address some of the fundamental irritants. We are often too quick to claim that excessive alcohol consumption or mental health issues are the primary causes of air rage - and they may well be either contributory or primary factors - but that does not excuse us from examining what we, in the aviation and hospitality industries, are doing which may fan the flames of aggression. So here, partly tongue in cheek, but also expressed in all seriousness, are my 'Top 5 Irritants' about airports, airlines and hotels. Some have a security angle, others just exemplify the frustrations of a frequent flier.

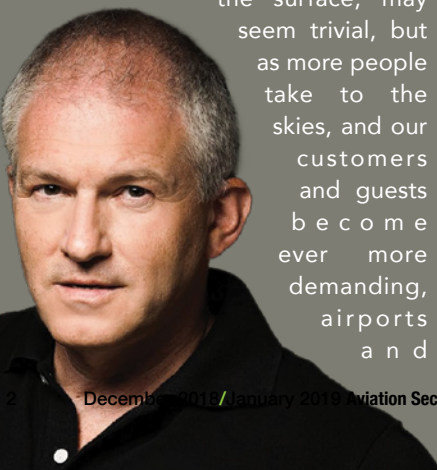
AIRPORTS:

I have always loved the airport experience. They are places full of emotion - the joy of welcoming home long-lost relatives, the sadness of bidding farewell to friends who may never be seen again, the emotionless procession of the business traveller to their gate on yet another lonely journey and the excitement of groups embarking on tours. Parents and children, siblings, lovers, colleagues, team members, crewmembers and even the bereaved. But there are aspects of airport life which I resent.

#1: Let's start with what we first need when arriving at a terminal with baggage - a baggage trolley. What used to be regarded as a universally free-to-use appliance is, in some locations, now a chargeable service. And one only available to people who have the right currency's coinage to hand or wish to use a credit card. I'm sorry, it's part of the service that airports should offer. I use trolleys when they are free, but will rarely do so when I have to pay... and I resent the airports that seem to feel it's another revenue stream.

#2: Centralised security checkpoints. The industry has moved away from gate screening as the increasing cost of screening technologies, and the staff needed to operate them, made a single centralised checkpoint a more economically viable solution to achieving compliance. Not only do I question the security benefit of centralised screening, where our ability to profile passengers is further diminished, but as a passenger I do resent the lengths of some of the queues (which, of course, can become targets) I've had to wait in.

#3: For years we taught people only to walk through an archway metal detector (AMD) after your tray had entered the X-ray machine. There was a risk that others - staff or passengers - could remove something if you did not maintain eye contact with your possessions. That's now nigh on impossible as we are instructed which tray to load, when to enter the AMD



and, having passed through the AMD, and assuming we are not pulled for secondary screening, we then have to scramble to be reunited with our bags, and our protruding wallets, iPhones and wristwatches, before the thieves get their hands on them. Am I exaggerating? Perhaps a little, but if you suffer from tray separation anxiety, it does step up the tension.

#4: Out-of-service biometric passport readers on arrival. You arrive on time and hastily make your way towards immigration only to find that despite there being 24 units in situ, the first 12 have a big red X on them! Fine when there's no queue, but when there is and the delay is going to result in your being charged extra by your taxi driver for exorbitant car park charges, it's not so amusing.

And **#5:** This is probably my biggest bugbear of them all and sadly one which I experience when I arrive at either of the two airports

closest to my home. Forcing all cars to park! OK, I get it. No waiting allowed. I would endorse that 100%, but forcing me to pay car park fees is neither customer-focussed nor is it environmentally friendly. It's just a money spinner. If I call a taxi, or a relative, after I am through immigration, there is no reason why they shouldn't be able to pick me up without entering the car park. Yes, I know there is a problem with Uber drivers parking in residential streets near airports waiting to be called, and using residents front gardens as toilets (I'm not kidding, it is an issue), but as an airport customer, I feel I am being ripped off. Forcing drivers to enter the car park doesn't stop them waiting outside. And even when I have been collecting somebody from an airport – somebody who I know is already waiting for me after customs – I see no value in making me drive around in circles through a multi-story car park, with all the added pollution that generates...except, of

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course, to make the airport money. And that is when I believe we fail; when we deliver no added service, and just appear to be on the take.

AIRLINES:

I have always enjoyed the variable experiences offered by the world's airlines. Little pieces of countries propelling us through the skies to exciting experiences and exposing us to new cultures, where the inflight meal, entertainment, décor and, of course, crewmembers all add to create a novel or trusted experience. I'm a little jaded now, but many airlines do offer that certain *je ne sais quoi* that enhances a trip. But it's not all fun.

SECURITY TIP #1

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#1: Flight safety briefings! Obviously necessary and well-intended, but, now so often the subject of comedy skits (and with good reason), it all makes sense until the crew point out the location of the emergency exits...which of course, they don't! The gesticulating adds little value and, I believe, actually detracts from the image we wish to have of them as safety and security professionals. And then there's the seatbelt instructions. "Insert the metal end into the buckle", and "To open lift the buckle cover". Come on...you go and check everybody has the belt on anyway. Why do we all have to listen to that part? And yet do we really know how to use the life jacket, open the emergency exit or inflate a life raft?

"...it all makes sense until the crew point out the location of the emergency exits...which of course, they don't! The gesticulating adds little value..."

#2: You settle down to watch a movie and then there's a cabin service announcement. Fair enough. The film restarts and then it stops so that the same announcement can be made in the language of the destination country. And, for some carriers, it's even repeated a third time as every announcement is made in English, the carrier's language and the language of the routing. Time we customised each seat's audio system to the language of the passenger.

#3: Mobile phone policies. Is it dangerous to have your mobile on inflight? If so, please make sure that people have actually turned them off. If it's not dangerous, then stop telling us to put our phones on airplane mode. On almost every flight I take, I dutifully switch my phone to airplane mode (obviously only when the aircraft is actually about to take off!) whilst those around me may stop actively using them, but do

little more. And, on landing, have you heard the cacophony of sound as all these mobile phones re-establish contact with their networks?!

#4: I'm fortunate enough to fly Business Class quite frequently, but my pet hate is the fact that the crew seem to want to draw out my dining experience. I'm working on my laptop – needing to use the tray table – and then along comes the table linen (which I really don't need), often well before the meal service. And as for clearing the meal tray – even more problematic in Economy – how long does it take? And all the time I am kept penned in. Talk about causing claustrophobic angst.

#5: And, I'm sorry, rightly or wrongly I regard this as an airline responsibility – baggage delivery times are often inexcusably long. And we remember the bad experiences, which are, after all, the last impression the airline leaves us with. Time for an industry-wide maximum delivery time? After all, my taxi's waiting and I'm paying.

HOTELS:

It's not all about the journey; so much of our trip is based on our accommodation. And hotels have a number of lessons to learn too!

#1: Room keys. Please could you make them out of the same materials they make credit cards from. I actually do need to keep my key by my mobile phone and I really don't want to have to return to my room after a night out only to have to go down to reception to have my key reprogrammed – and be told off for my failure to ensure separation of phone and key!

#2: I am all in favour of being environmentally friendly, but I am sorry, I just don't believe that you want me to reuse my towels every day to save the planet. Nor do I want to pay for a service and then be made to feel guilty about the damage I am causing. Does anybody know whether Trump hotels have this policy? After all, isn't global warming a fallacy?!

#3: Checkout times. Sure, rooms have to be cleaned to accommodate the next guest, but for the guest who checks in late in the evening to have to depart early – in some places 10 or 11am – it makes the whole experience less than restful. It must be possible to have aircrew-style hotel room availability on offer to all?

#4: Porters. No offence, but I hate it when a porter comes to grab my bag from the taxi and insists on taking it to my room so that I can be shown how to use the key and the air conditioning system! Make porters available – absolutely – but don't force people into situations where they feel duty-bound to tip.

And, for me, **#5** is the worst of all and has nothing to do with money. I wear glasses, but not in the shower or the bath. It's really kind of hotels to provide shampoo, conditioner and shower gel, but why do they have

"...kind of hotels to provide shampoo, conditioner and shower gel, but why do they have to miniaturise not only the bottle but the print on the bottles..."

to miniaturise not only the bottle but the print on the bottles to the point that, at the one time I am not wearing my glasses, I have no idea what I am applying to my body!

Sending you seasons greetings for a relaxed, enjoyable, healthy and prosperous new year. ■

Mr Grumpy